

JULY - AUGUST 1959

# The Reformed Journal

A PERIODICAL OF REFORMED COMMENT AND OPINION

---

GRAND RAPIDS TO GINDIRI, 1959

*Lester DeKoster*

UNION WITH CHRIST

*R. F. R. Gardner*

SYNOD ON BIBLICAL INFALLIBILITY

*Henry Stob*

REVELATION AND THE BIBLE

*Lewis B. Smedes*

THE GOSPEL AND HISTORY

*Leonard Sweetman, Jr.*

A NOTE ON CHAPELS

*Leonard Verduin*

CALVIN'S SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

*John Timmer*

*Book Reviews*

*Letters to the Journal*



*Books of  
Timely Interest  
and Lasting  
Importance*

**"Fundamentalism"  
and the  
Word of God**

J. I. PACKER. This is an epoch-making book on such subjects as Infallibility, Inerrancy, Verbal Inspiration, Divine Origin, Dictation, Accommodation, The Nature of Scripture, Interpretation of Scripture, The Holy Spirit as Interpreter, and a score of other very important subjects. 191 pages. \$1.25

**The Infallible Word**

NED B. STONEHOUSE and PAUL WOOLLEY, Editors. This standard work is a meaty and up-to-date examination and refutation of critical attacks on the infallibility of the Bible by faculty members of Westminster Theological Seminary. \$3.00

**Inspiration and  
Interpretation**

JOHN F. WALVOORD, Editor. The Evangelical Theological Society volume setting forth representative views of Scripture held by leading theologians from Irenaeus to Emil Brunner. \$4.50

**Thy Word Is Truth**

EDWARD J. YOUNG. An excellent defense of the conservative interpretations of the inspiration of Scripture and its corollary belief of the infallibility of the Written Word. \$3.50



at your bookstore, or  
**Wm. B. EERDMANS  
PUBLISHING CO.**  
GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

# The Reformed Journal

A PERIODICAL OF REFORMED COMMENT & OPINION

Volume IX

JULY-AUGUST 1959

No. 7

*Editorial Board*

HENRY STOB, HARRY R. BOER, JAMES DAANE  
LESTER DEKOSTER, GEORGE STOB

*Publisher*

William B. Eerdmans, Sr.

GRAND RAPIDS TO GINDIRI, 1959	3
Mr. Lester DeKoster, <i>Director of the Library, Calvin College</i>	
UNION WITH CHRIST	5
Dr. R. F. R. Gardner, <i>M.D. at the Sudan United Mission hospital, Vom, Northern Nigeria</i>	
SYNOD ON BIBLICAL INFALLIBILITY	7
Dr. Henry Stob, <i>Professor of Ethics and Apologetics, Calvin Seminary</i>	
REVELATION AND THE BIBLE — A REVIEW	10
Dr. Lewis B. Smedes, <i>Associate Professor of Bible, Calvin College</i>	
THE GOSPEL AND HISTORY	14
Rev. Leonard Sweetman, Jr., <i>Graduate Student at the Free University of Amsterdam</i>	
A NOTE ON CHAPELS	
Rev. Leonard Verduin, <i>Minister of the Campus Chapel, Ann Arbor, Michigan</i>	
THE INSTITUTES: CALVIN'S SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY	18
Mr. John Timmer, <i>Missionary-elect to Japan</i>	
BOOK REVIEWS	21
LETTERS TO THE JOURNAL	23

PUBLISHED MONTHLY, excepting August, by the Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, at 231 Jefferson Avenue, S.E., Grand Rapids 3, Michigan. Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at Grand Rapids, Michigan. SUBSCRIPTION RATES: 25c per copy; \$2.50 one year; \$4.00 two years. ADDRESS all subscriptions to Subscription Department, *The Reformed Journal*, 231 Jefferson Avenue, S. E., Grand Rapids 3, Michigan. Address all editorial and advertising communications to Managing Editor and Advertising Manager respectively. Managing Editor: Calvin P. Bulthuis; Advertising Manager: David Wynbeek.



# Grand Rapids to Gindiri, 1959

by Lester DeKoster

THE Christian Reformed Synod of 1959 acted on the question of Christian Reformed participation in the Theological College of Northern Nigeria. Synod decided:

1. That the Christian Reformed Church participate in TCNN only to the extent of loaning Dr. Boer as teacher of Reformed Theology to TCNN.

2. To pay the full cost of Dr. Boer's teaching, for salary, housing, and traveling, according to normal procedure.

3. To declare that a Missionary-Teacher loaned to teach at TCNN is not thereby violating his ordination vows.

4. To instruct the Christian Reformed Board of Missions and the Nigerian General Conference to maintain and develop the Reformed Pastor's Training program in Nigeria with a view to hopefully establishing a Reformed theological seminary.

(From *The Banner*, July 3, 1959)

Having participated in previous discussion of this subject, I take the liberty now of inquiring: What did Synod of 1959 do by these decisions?

Time and events really define the meaning of our actions, and so one can only hazard his best guess as to what these decisions will mean. Nor could I pretend to discern what opinions and motivations come to expression in the four points I have enumerated. Judging only, then, from what is written before us: What did Synod do?

In a word, I think it may be replied that Synod pointed the way to a solution of, without itself resolving, one of the basic problems which must always concern any denomination which takes its convictions seriously. I wish to enlarge briefly upon this theme.

Much of the Christian life, be it personal or denominational, is lived in tension, though the outlines of the tensions are often undiscerned. We are drawn, I mean, by conflicting obligations. Rarely is any choice before us simply and starkly a choice between black and white. We seek, indeed, to live out of principles, but our abstract absolutes come time and again to a reckoning with the concrete realities of daily life; as, for example, when the duty to tell only the truth meets the questioning eyes of a mortally ill friend or relative. Then a principle comes into collision with life at a bedside; and then, if we pause thoughtfully, we may suddenly realize with awe how much our lives are full of such hidden tensions, of which we become grimly aware only as they are illumined by one concrete problem after another.

In this sense, the call to participate in TCNN

revealed a hidden tension which must confront, as I have said, every denomination which lives in compelling loyalty to its distinctive creeds. For in a call like that to join TCNN, loyalty to denominational distinctiveness is revealed as being in tension with loyalty to the Church Universal, of which any Denomination can claim to be only a living member. (I do not use "ecumenicity" for *Church Universal* because of its vast and loose variety of meaning in the current literature.) The presence, in the problem posed by TCNN, of *two legitimate loyalties* — that to a Church, and that to the Church — explains why men could, in good faith, take quite different attitudes toward that College.

## The Church Universal

Elsewhere in this journal appear a few of the countless testimonies borne by John Calvin to the basic unity of the Church Universal: *one Head* meant indisputably to him *one Body*; and Calvin was prepared to admit a considerable latitude in doctrine and in life rather than to sever the visible unity, in history, of the temporal manifestation of the Body of Christ. Calvin went further. Not only did he resist separation, but he insisted that "God chiefly aims at gathering us into one body." And if this unifying process were indeed God's chief aim with His Church, it follows that Calvin will be saying, and he does, "Apostles and teachers of the Church are appointed to gather the Lord's scattered flock, that under Christ we may all be united in the same body."

Probably few if any members of the Church, outside the Fundamentalist sects, would differ much, at least in the abstract, from Calvin's views as cited above. Problems arise, attended by whole retinues of differing opinions, only when this abstract statement of the nature and task of the Church and of its ministry comes into collision with a concrete problem like that posed by TCNN.

## A Denomination

And the problem comes into sharp focus precisely because we are also loyal to a Denomination. We have, many of us, known from youth how Christian Reformed views differ from those of other denominations, even such denominations as also trace their roots back through Geneva. We consider loyalty to our creeds as correlative to, if not identical with, loyalty to the Church Universal. But the tension which lies hidden within this abstract conviction becomes visible when problems like TCNN



present themselves. The call to participate in a union theological enterprise with fellow members of the Church Universal poses unmistakably the underlying tension between denominational and universal loyalties. The question with which Synod of 1959 was struggling was this: How can genuine and legitimate denominational commitment be harmonized with equally genuine and legitimate commitment to the Church Universal, at the expense of neither?

### Synod's Decisions

As time and experience give their interpretation to the four decisions of Synod, I think it will become increasingly evident that these statements point out a direction, the one in which a resolution of the tension between denominational and universal loyalties must be sought; although Synod did not altogether resolve the tension itself, as it came to expression in TCNN.

Synod made two significant decisions which, taken together, point clearly enough to the possibility that both loyalties can be sustained, and defended, without the compromise of either. First, Synod declared the Christian Reformed Church a *participant* (though, indeed, a strictly circumscribed one) in a union enterprise with fellow believers. Second, Synod declared that such participation does *not* bring our missionary-teacher into conflict with his ordination vows. Together these point the way out of the tension between denominational and universal loyalties: Dr. Boer (and we with him) can be loyal to our creeds, even as he participates (and we with him) in interdenominational enterprise with other brethren in Christ. This, it seems to me, is what history will reveal to be the significance of Synod's 1959 declarations on TCNN. And this is a heartening response to a baffling problem, for we all earnestly wish to maintain both loyalties not only, but long to coalesce them into one.

Practically, what did Synod do?

It is accurate to observe that the Theological College goes on. We have withheld specifically only our wholehearted blessing and unconditional participation. By keeping and sustaining Dr. Boer at Gindiri, Synod rejected the argument that compromise or bitterness must inevitably arise in such a union pedagogical enterprise; or, at the least, Synod was willing to wait and see. Again, Synod did not fall prey to the fear that TCNN graduates would be confused and uncertain of their convictions; on the contrary, it overwhelmingly defeated a motion to oblige pastor candidates from our Tiv and Benue fields to avoid TCNN. Most significantly, Synod declared the Christian Reformed Church a *participant* in TCNN. The term is carefully limited; and it may be that the limitation was more prominent in the minds of some delegates than was the principal word — *participate* — itself; of this it is hazardous to judge now. But

no ordinary reader of the decisions can escape the logical, grammatical, and, therefore presumably intentional relationship of a statement of principle — we *participate* — and its qualification — *only to the extent of . . .*

### The Road Ahead

On the other hand, Synod only pointed out the road toward a resolution of the tension revealed by TCNN. "Only to the extent of" means that Synod did not now wholly resolve the issue: it is, so much to the Church Universal, and so much reserved for ourselves. The problem remains: how much to each, without compromise? (And the answer finally will be: our *all* to both, in *Jesus Christ* where only, and all, tensions can be ultimately resolved.) Synod's trouble with this problem is revealed also in the very close vote (54-53) by which the amendment in Decision Four — to move hopefully toward a Reformed Seminary in Nigeria — was adopted: does our denominational loyalty *oblige* us to establish a rival school, where an evangelical College already exists and the Reformed school is not eagerly desired? Synod can hardly be said to have given an unequivocal answer to this question. But who can expect that it should? Never before had this tension been so sharply etched into the consciousness of the Christian Reformed Church as it was by TCNN. That Synod pointed the way to the answer is, despite higher hopes many of us entertained, a significant accomplishment.

Indeed, whatever may have been the hopes in our heart, as we look back now at the complexity of the issue, and as we reconsider more quietly the implications which TCNN has for other "calls" to other "Gindiri's" which are bound to come, perhaps these 1959 decisions meet as best we could at this stage in our denominational life, the tension between denominational and universal loyalties.

I do not know how other observers interpret Synod's action on TCNN. We can only guess at how history will define it. But this we know: these decisions represent the Lord's way with us, in 1959. And we must ask, then, what He has meant to teach us by the "call," by the long discussion, by the decisions we have taken.

May I venture the suggestion that perhaps He means, for those who most ardently hoped that we would have done with TCNN altogether, that the Christian Reformed Church has spiritual riches enough, and maturity enough, to move with poise, strength, and faithfulness out into active service on united fronts? And to those of us who hoped that "only to the extent of" (and in all participation there is a certain *only to some extent*) would include a more wholehearted blessing and greater financial support, perhaps He means to say that the "mills of God grind slowly," and there is time enough to see if this enterprise be of His hand.



But if we are to profit most, all of us, from the discussions and the decisions of 1959, we must humble ourselves to learn from this revelation of God in our own history. And, looking back, at my own articles, too, I miss the tone of humility. We have all ardently considered the worthiness of TCNN to receive our participation. But have we wondered enough if we are worthy of the confidence and trust which the Nigerians repose in us? Have we — and I address myself first of all — viewed this challenge more from our knees, or more from our pedestal? Have we been as concerned with what *contribution we could* make, as we have been

with what calamities *might* befall us? Has this been for us an occasion for judging ourselves, or for judging others?

There is, no doubt, judgment revealed in the decisions of Synod, 1959, on TCNN: a judgment of the School, yes; but also a judgment of ourselves.

And the final question is not: Will the School prosper with only our circumscribed participation? It will, if God so intends. The final question is: Can we continue on the road which Synod points out, so that when other legitimate "calls" come, we shall be ready wholeheartedly to share, to lead, and to serve?

## Union with Christ

by R. F. R. Gardner

BISHOP Handley Moule has recorded his morning Act of Faith. It commences: "I believe in the name of the Son of God. Therefore *I am in Him*, having redemption through His blood and life by His spirit." It was while meditating on this second sentence that the present writer found his thoughts following an unaccustomed path. This is recorded to stimulate discussion and Bible study, for it would seem to be of some importance for our individual and corporate witness to establish the validity or otherwise of his conclusions.

Union with Christ, and the life in Him, is the very core of our faith. In a letter to his sister Hudson Taylor tells of his own realization of this truth: "I saw not only that Jesus would never leave me, but that I was a member of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. The vine now I see is not the root merely but all root, stem, branches, twigs, leaves, flowers, fruit . . . . It is a wonderful thing to be really one with a risen and exalted Saviour; to be a member of Christ! Think what it involves. Can Christ be rich and I poor? Can your right hand be rich and the left, poor?" Professor J. S. Stewart of Edinburgh goes so far as to say: "The heart of Paul's religion is union with Christ. This, more than any other conception — more than justification, more than sanctification, more even than reconciliation — is the key which unlocks the secrets of his soul." This discovery has not been confined to evangelicals. We find an Anglo-Catholic writing, "The sacred heart is your shelter, I know, and the valley of shadows becomes a 'lover's lane' for those who walk therein with the Beloved"; while a modern Roman Catholic saint puts it this way: "Jesus and the little Therese had long since looked at one another and had under-

stood. That day, our meeting could no longer be called a simple look, but a fusion. We were no longer two."

AS described by our Lord Himself in the upper room, there are two sides to this union. Christ lives in us, and we live in Him. The former has been rightly much stressed, but the latter does not seem to have been widely emphasized. If Christ is in the Christian, then wherever the Christian goes he takes Christ. This is indeed a salutary thought in directing the choice of our occupations and places of entertainment. But conversely, if we are in Him, then wherever He goes He takes us, just as inevitably. This thought leads us further than we might at first imagine, for we find Paul (I Corinthians 12:3) writing, "No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit." The ascription "Lord" would seem to imply belief in the resurrection and deity of Christ, and the acceptance of His right to direct one's life in every respect. Wherever then there are those who acknowledge Christ in this way, there is the Holy Spirit, and therefore Christ, and there are we. This must follow irrespective of our own desires, and therefore any attempt to separate ourselves from other true believers, be they never so misguided in doctrine or practice, is quite impossible.

One's imagination boggles at the implications of this. It is easy for us to rejoice at blessing in our own fellowship or our own communion. But how many of us look further afield? One remembers a Scots woman of mature Christian experience saying, "Until so-and-so preached recently in our church I did not know that there were any real Christians in the Church of England." That would



be amusing were the same sort of thing not basic in our own thinking. The same missionaries who rejoice to read of the Ruanda revival nevertheless can use "C.M.S. Christian" as an epithet of scorn.<sup>1</sup> Those of us who look forward to the Return of our Lord are a little dismayed and — shall we confess it — sorry, to see such Scriptural references to it, and similar truths, in the documents of Evanston. Few can read without a thrill of the recently unearthed traces of Christianity in the China of Kublai Khan. Rejoicing that half a millenium ago men braved incredible difficulties to take the gospel to Cathay, we forgive them for being Franciscans. Perhaps, following the strong recommendation of Tom Allan, we read *Revolution in a City Parish*. If there we find the Abbe Michonneau describing what is very obviously a work of the Holy Spirit in his Roman Catholic church in Paris — what then? It is more comfortable to shut our eyes and ears to these things. We would rather they were not true. Fifty years ago Alexander Whyte, that giant of the Scots Kirk, recognized this frailty in our nature, for in his lectures on Teresa of Avilla we hear him thunder: "God had much people in the Spain of that day, and he who is not glad to hear that will never have a place among them."

It is so easy to take refuge in II Corinthians 6. However, a recent Evangelical Alliance study reminds us that "an examination of the passage will reveal that it has nothing whatever to say about the relations of Christians with their fellow-Christians. It is concerned entirely and exclusively with the relations of Christian believers to the non-believing world — to those, that is, who deny the name of Jesus and lead Godless and impure lives." But, we reply, just look how far these so-called Christians of other groups fail in every respect. Bishop Hollis has some remarks, in connection with weak Indian churches, which are appropriate here too: "The reality of the work of God in Christ among them is not more denied by the fact of their imperfect life and witness than was the reality of His work in Corinth by the gross sins, faction, impurity, litigiousness and the like which stained the church there in the days of St. Paul."

WHAT is the meaning of this for each of us? In what practical way does our involvement affect us? Our Lord is busy in a million enterprises in the world today, and we in Him; yet obviously we cannot even know of more than a few. What then is He asking of us?

First: Let us never be over-hasty to quote Matthew 7:21: "Not every one who says Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven." In Matthew 12 we find the Pharisees ascribing to the devil what

was, in fact, the work of Christ. It was this that occasioned His terrible teaching on the unforgivable sin. Yet we do not need to look long or far to find this sort of thing in fundamentalist literature, especially nowadays in reference to the ecumenical movement.

Secondly: Let us realize our responsibilities for our fellow believers. We should consider that a minority which has, for the sake of purity of doctrine, separated itself from a parent body has a heavy responsibility for the latter. Is it right that the minority should withdraw from its parent the light and insight, and spiritual zeal, which it so sorely needs? Similarly, failure to participate in joint movements, where such participation is possible, places a responsibility for any lack of truth or evangelical emphasis which such a movement shows, on the body which, having these things, stays aloof.

Thirdly: When we hear of this or that work of the Spirit let it be, not "They," but "We." In his description of the seventh-century Council of Whitby with its heated controversy between Celtic and Roman representatives, the venerable Bede can nevertheless quote one of the latter as saying, "Even your Columba — or may I say *ours* also if he was a servant of Christ . . ." Let that be our attitude, as our Lord taught: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another."

Bishop Moule's Act of Faith continues: "To Him I belong, by purchase, conquest, and self-surrender." Go with Him we must. Are we to go unwillingly, dragged along as captives, repudiating the enterprise with our every gasp, ashamed to be seen there even in His company? Or go we gaily with the eager joy of self-abandonment to our Lord and to His perfect will?

---

*Jesus, with Thy Church abide,  
Be her Savior, Lord and Guide,  
While on earth her faith is tried;  
We beseech Thee, hear us.  
Keep her life and doctrine pure;  
Grant her patience to endure,  
Trusting in Thy promises sure:  
We beseech Thee, hear us.  
May she one in doctrine be,  
One in truth and charity,  
Winning men to faith in Thee:  
We beseech Thee, hear us.*

—THOMAS B. POLLOCK

(1) The Ruanda revival in East Africa has to no small extent been strengthened by, and taken place in the (Anglican) Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) area.



# Synod on Biblical Infallibility

by Henry Stob

THE Synod of the Christian Reformed Church which met in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in June of this year made a number of significant decisions on Biblical Infallibility. It made these, as the readers of the *Journal* will doubtless know, against the background of events that had recently occurred in the Church, the chief of them being the publication of an article on infallibility by a Calvin Seminary student in *Stromata*. Some time after its appearance, this article received critical notice in the Church press, whereupon a kind of alarm spread throughout the Church, which was followed by consistorial and classical appeals to Synod for immediate action. Although a considerable section of the Church was not alarmed by the student's article, and hoped that Synod would refer the theological questions raised in it to a Committee for study and appraisal, Synod, while not neglecting to constitute a Study Committee, made certain pronouncements of its own which could affect the course of theological reflection in the Church for several years to come. What then did Synod do?

THE first thing Synod did was to adopt a set of six Resolutions framed by the Reformed Ecumenical Synod of Potchefstroom in 1958. Although each of these six Resolutions is significant, the fifth and sixth, as amended, bear most directly upon the question at issue in the Church. They declare, in part, that it is the sustained faith of the historic Christian Church "that Scripture in its whole extent and in all its parts is the infallible and inerrant Word of God" and that "to this faith as it is clearly expressed in the creeds of the Reformed Churches the Christian Reformed Church bears witness . . ."

It was argued at Synod that these Resolutions should not be immediately adopted, but referred to a Study Committee for scrutiny and advice. In other years, and under different circumstances, this advice would doubtless have been followed, for Synod normally makes just this kind of referral when decisions of the Ecumenical Synod are up for consideration. There was good reason for proceeding according to custom in the present instance too, for the Resolutions rest as Conclusions upon a lengthy Report which constitutes their interpretative context, but which most delegates to Synod had not even seen. Moreover, although these Resolutions do have a bearing upon the question at issue between those who condemn and those who tolerate the student article, they do not resolve that question,

and their immediate adoption was from this precise point of view unnecessary and not particularly helpful. It was obvious to many, moreover, that the language of the Resolutions was at several points stylistically questionable, and that adoption should therefore wait upon the making of editorial changes.

None of these considerations, however, deterred Synod from adopting the Resolutions. There appears to have been a feeling that something must be said at once to allay the fears and suspicions that had been aroused in the Church by the journalistic activity of the previous months. I do not myself think that these fears and suspicions were justified by any views expressed within the Seminary community, but that they existed in the heart and mind of the faithful can hardly be doubted. Under the circumstances, therefore, it seemed good to Synod to allay these fears by bearing witness once again to the Church's continuing faith in the Scriptures as the inspired and infallible Word of God.

That Synod made its witness by a well-nigh unanimous vote, and with the expressed concurrence of delegates on both sides of the current debate, is significant. It demonstrates the basic unity we enjoy and it should convince the doubtful that the authority of Scripture as the infallible rule of faith and life is not in dispute among us. Indeed, if Synod's decision should have this desirable effect no one will really regret that in this particular it acted in just the way it did, for nothing is so necessary in the current dispute as the recognition that the disputants move within a common framework of belief concerning the Holy Scriptures.

THE second thing Synod did was to address itself directly to the question at issue. That question was: Where minor differences of numerical and historical detail occur in the reports of the Biblical writers, is it in violation of the Creed to explain the differences by assuming that one of the Biblical writers was in error on the point of difference and that the Holy Spirit was not concerned to correct this error since accuracy at this juncture was not necessary to His purpose? On this question a difference of opinion existed in the Church and Synod undertook to resolve the difference. Properly to understand and appraise Synod's action the exact point of difference must be carefully observed.

As has already been said, the point of difference did not affect the common acceptance of the Bible



as the inspired, authoritative, and infallible Word of God. No one disputed that the Bible is absolutely authoritative in all that it intends to teach, that what is set down in the originally finished Scriptures was from beginning to end under the governance of the Holy Spirit, and that these Scriptures are therefore in their whole extent the infallible and inerrant rule of faith and life. On these points all were agreed.

All were agreed, too, that minor differences of numerical and historical detail occur in the best Biblical texts we possess. All were further agreed that some of these differences can be convincingly reconciled in strict accordance with accepted hermeneutical principles, that others of them plausibly lend themselves to speculative harmonization, and that the remainder of them may be regarded as being absent from the autographa, that is, as being the importations of copyists.

The point of dispute was whether unreconciled or unreconcilable minor differences in the Biblical text we possess *must*, by one who accepts the Reformed creeds, be regarded as being absent from the autographa and referrable only to copyists, or whether these differences *may* be regarded as having been allowed by the Holy Spirit while actively exercising His superintendency over the Biblical writers. The question at issue was: Do the creeds constrain us to declare that the Holy Spirit, as the Inspirer of the Bible, *could not* have permitted the writers of Scripture to misstate a peripheral fact not germane to His purpose?

It was agreed on all sides that the creeds *do permit* us to declare that the Holy Spirit allowed the writers to use numbers inexactly; it was recognized that the use of round or approximate numbers is characteristic of the Bible. It was further agreed that the creeds *do permit* us to declare that the Holy Spirit allowed the writers to move within the relatively narrow limits of their own restricted vocabulary; it was recognized that to accomplish the work of providing an authoritative and infallible revelation of God the Holy Spirit was not required to remove every instance of grammatical infelicity and all turgidity of style. But it was not agreed that the creeds permit us to declare that the Holy Spirit allowed the writers to include an imperfectly recorded historical detail.

Some members of the Church, including myself, judged that on the points of agreement and disagreement just enumerated the Creeds did not express themselves at all, or at least not in any direct, obvious, or definitive way. We judged that these points, the third no less than the first and second, were not questions of faith primarily, but questions of Biblical science to be resolved upon the basis of a close study of the Scriptures themselves. We judged that insight

into the truth or falsity of these matters was not to be gained either directly or by inference from the Creeds, but by theological inquiry and reflection operating in accordance with the broader and more basic creedal affirmations. We judged, in short, that these matters were subjects of honest research, and that they were freely and responsibly discussable in a Reformed community respectful of and faithful to its Forms of Unity.

The fact that we thought these matters discussable does not mean that we thought we had the answer; it means quite the opposite, that the answer was not yet finally in. Some, indeed, of those who judged that the Creeds were non-committal on these matters, and that the point of disagreement therefore was a proper subject of theological discussion, themselves believed that no "actual historical inaccuracies" occur in Scripture. Others were uncertain. None were dogmatic in either direction. This explains a notable feature of both the presynodical and the synodical debate. No one in a position of leadership, so far as I am aware, declared that there were "actual historical inaccuracies" in the Bible and named chapter and verse. This silence was not a tactic of evasion born of timidity. It was induced by honesty and reflected the conviction that dogmatism here was simply out of order and that what was needed was a careful and co-operative investigation of the acceptability of what from the point of view of the creeds was clearly a live option.

Synod did not share this conviction. Synod declared that "it is inconsonant with the Creeds to declare or suggest that there is an area of Scripture in which it is allowable to posit the possibility of actual historical inaccuracies." In substantiation it referred to Article V of the Belgic Confession: "... believing without any doubt all things contained therein."

This decision was taken upon the recommendation of an advisory committee working while Synod was in session. The decision was not taken on the basis of extended discussions in the Church press illuminating the question from both sides; such discussion had not taken place. It was not taken after long investigation by a study committee. It was not taken after consideration by Consistory and Classis. It was not taken after consultation with other Reformed Churches who embrace the same Creeds and are as anxious as we that these creeds be properly understood and applied. The decision was taken without extended preliminary investigation, and it was taken in spite of the fact that half of the Seminary Faculty and at least three Classes had urged Synod to postpone action until a study committee had carefully considered what they regarded as an open question. The de-



cision was taken with no less than forty-four ministers and elders opposing it.

It is no doubt permissible to say that the decision of Synod was, to say the least, precipitate. It is undoubtedly realistic to say that the decision contravened the convictions of a considerable segment of the Church. It is to be hoped that the Committee which Synod appointed will reconsider the action of Synod, since its mandate clearly allows for this, and that the Church generally will consider whether the Creeds do actually say what the Synod of 1959 understood them to say.

THE third thing Synod did was to appoint a Committee with a double mandate: (1) to consider whether there is "some aspect" of the words (of Scripture) which is not germane to the Spirit's purpose, and (2) to study the relationship between inspiration and infallibility in the light of Scripture and our creedal standards.

It would seem that the Committee was hereby charged to enter upon a consideration of the entire question prematurely acted upon by Synod. This is substantiated by the grounds adopted for the appointment of the Committee. The Committee was appointed because: (1) The conviction of the Church on such a crucial point of doctrine should not be decided hastily; (2) This (cf. Mandate 1) is a relatively new distinction in the theological

discussion of the Church; (3) The problem is exceedingly complex, involving both apologetic methodology and far-reaching doctrinal implications; (4) The Faculty (of Calvin Seminary) has suggested the need for a study of the relationship of inspiration and infallibility (the Faculty declares that there is "a 'necessary connection' between the Scriptural teaching on Inspiration and Infallibility rightly understood," but agrees "that the relationship between Inspiration and Infallibility is not one of 'simple identification.' " Moreover, while the Faculty holds "that the Scripture does teach its own infallibility, . . . [it] feels the need for a clarification of the term"); (5) The Board of Trustees (of Calvin College and Seminary) has recommended that a study be made of the relationship between inspiration and infallibility in the light of Scripture and our creedal standards; (6) Classis Chicago North, Classis Holland, and the Neland Avenue Consistory have asked for a study of the problem.

It would appear from this that the whole question agitating the Church is now in the hands of a Study Committee, which will no doubt profit from any public discussion calculated to illumine the matters referred to it. It is to be hoped that the Church will assist the Committee in every possible way. The peace and profit of the Churches will, we may trust, be thereby served.

## JOHN CALVIN ON THE CHURCH

"For wherever we find the word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, there, it is not to be doubted, is a Church of God . . . " \* \* \*

"However this may be, where the word is heard with reverence, and the sacraments are not neglected, there we discover, while that is the case, an appearance of the Church, which is liable to no suspicion of uncertainty, of which no one can safely despise the authority or reject the admonitions, or resist the counsels, or slight the censures, much less separate from it and break up its unity." \* \* \*

"It is possible, moreover, that some fault may insinuate itself into the preaching of the doctrine, or the administration of the sacraments, which ought not to alienate us from its communion. For all the articles of true doctrine are not of the same description. Some are so necessary to be known, that they ought to be universally received as fixed and indubitable principles, as the peculiar maxims of religion; such as, that there is one God; that Christ is God and the Son of God; that our salvation depends on the mercy of God; and the like. There are others, which are controverted among the churches, yet without destroying the unity of the faith." \* \* \*

"It is of importance, indeed, that we should agree in every thing; but as there is no person who is not enveloped with some cloud of ignorance, either we must allow of no church at all, or we must forgive mistakes in those things, of which persons may be ignorant, without the violating of the essence of religion, or incurring the loss of salvation. . . . " (*Institutes*, IV:1:9-12, selections)

"We are called to one inheritance and one life; and hence it follows that we cannot obtain eternal life without living in mutual harmony in this world. One Divine invitation being addressed to all, they ought to be united in the same profession of faith, and to render every kind of assistance to each other. Oh, were this thought deeply impressed upon our minds, that we are subject to a law which no more permits the children of God to differ among themselves than the kingdom of heaven to be divided, how earnestly should we cultivate brotherly kindness! How should we dread every kind of animosity, if we duly reflected that all who separate us from the brethren, estrange us from the Kingdom of God! And yet, strangely enough, while we forget the duties which brethren owe to each other, we go on boasting that we are the sons of God. Let us learn from Paul, that none are at all fit for that

(These excerpts are continued on page 13)



# Revelation and the Bible

## *A Review*

by Lewis B. Smedes

When twenty-five scholars of evangelical reputation join hands to produce a large book called *Revelation and the Bible*,\* we are obliged to take careful note of what they say. When the book appears among us at a time when the Bible is the center of vigorous debate, it is surrounded with special interest. Our interest is increased still more by the editor, Dr. Carl Henry, as he relates the circumstances in which the volume was conceived. We are able to detect from Dr. Henry's preface three lines of thought that influenced the conception of this book. First, there was a common conviction among the writers that the authority of the Bible lies at the heart of all theological conviction; hence, the urgency of the book. Second, there was felt a pressing need for a constructive response to neo-orthodox views on the revelation and inspiration of the Bible which the writers had confronted and found wanting at important points; hence, the contemporaneity of the book. Third, there was a shared discontent with fundamentalist defenses of the Bible in times past, defenses which Dr. Henry describes as reactionary, anti-intellectual, and negative; hence, the promise of integrity in the writing of the book. We have, then, a book by men who bow before the absolute authority of the Word of God and who consider the authority of the Word central to theology, by men who have seriously conversed with contemporary theology, and by men who have declined to take fundamentalistic escape routes from urgent problems. We are led to expect writing with a sense of urgency, of contemporaneity, of integrity. In the main, the volume confirms the hopes aroused by the editor.

Among us these days, a reader of a book like this wants badly to get at one particular matter. He wants to know what the writers say about the inerrancy of the Bible. Happily, however, the authors are concerned with the much broader and more important subject of God's revelation of Himself and the relation of His revelation to the Bible. Inerrancy is but a particularly problematic part of this wider subject, and the book treats it as such. The volume is a symposium of twenty-four essays on a wide variety of subjects that have to do with God's revelation. There are first-rate pieces on the nature of divine revelation, on the place of the Bible in that revelation, on the Church's accept-

ance of the books of the Bible as its own canon, on higher criticism, on archaeology, and on several other subjects relevant to the main theme. The publication of these essays in a single volume provides a valuable survey of evangelical opinion. The subject of the inerrancy of the Bible, however, could not remain out of the picture totally, nor for long. It is discussed in its place. That it does not take the most prominent place suggests that to these authors the authority of God's Word does not begin nor end with the Bible's inerrancy. Still, we cannot deny that, for this review, we are keenly interested in what the book says about inerrancy.

More than in *what* they say about inerrancy, however, we are interested in *how* they say it, how they deal with the subject and its problems. We are interested in their approach, their set of mind. What we want to watch is their method. Conclusions that they draw are secondary because they are almost bound to be tentative and debatable. But the method used in reaching them determines to a large extent whether or not future discussions can be fruitful or even possible. The method of the book is generally first to talk about revelation, then about the Bible, and then about inspiration and, finally, about inerrancy — with other subjects inserted along the way. This, I think, is the right order. This way the inerrancy of the Bible is not made the cornerstone of the inspiration of the Bible. Whether the divine inspiration of the Bible involves the inerrancy of the Bible is a matter duly considered. But the inspiration and, hence, the authority of the Bible is not made to rest on whether the Bible is inerrant or not. Dr. Henry says of the authors that they do not "rest the entire case for inspiration on the results of inspiration, such as inerrancy . . ." (p. 9). And Dr. Geoffrey W. Bromily, now of Fuller Theological Seminary, specifically warns us against inverting the order of inspiration and inerrancy. He cautions us against "suspending" the inspiration of the Bible on the inerrancy of the Bible (p. 216). This is why the subject of inspiration is not tied down to the subject of inerrancy. In this review, we shall follow the argument of the book in this order — revelation, the Bible, inspiration, and inerrancy. But, as we have already admitted, our chief interest falls on the last item. And on that subject — inerrancy — we shall be mostly concerned with the *how* of the authors' approach.

\*Edited by Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1959; 413 pp., \$5.95).



DR. Paul K. Jewett, of Fuller Seminary, writes an essay about the character of divine revelation. He writes with a background of extensive study in the theology of Emil Brunner. Brunner, as is well known, teaches that God's revelation is always personal, always a self-disclosure of a Person to a person, that it occurs when God as a Person encounters men directly at given moments in their historical situation. Dr. Jewett finds truth in this emphasis, but adds a needed corrective. A revelation that gives knowledge of God is not exclusively the untranslatable experience of personal encounter; it must also provide rational knowledge *about* God. The personal encounter with God is made intelligible by knowledge, rational and logical statements of truth, about Him. Divine revelation is, however, not only a matter of personal encounter, but of the acts of God in history. God does something, and in doing it He reveals His grace and judgment. But an act of God requires an explanation of its meaning before that act fulfills the purpose of a revelation. The Exodus, if we may use our own illustration, would be only a mysteriously supernatural or heroic saga without Moses and the prophets to explain its redemptive meaning. "A truly revelatory situation," says Dr. Jewett, "is one in which God not only does something, but interprets what He does . . ." (p. 52). Divine revelation, then, is primarily God's personal encounter with men and God's mighty acts in history, plus statements about God and an explanation of His acts. The actual personal encounter and the mighty acts took place in the past. But the account of them and the explanation of them were recorded for us who came later.

The writing down of the story of God's acts, the writing down of their explanation, and the record of personal encounters with God created the book we call the Bible. "The Bible . . . is simply the sacred record of what God has done in history together with the inspired authoritative interpretation of these saving events" (p. 48). Dr. Ned Stonehouse, of Westminster Seminary, carries on this line of thought to the next step by showing that this "writing down" was included in the total story of revelation. The writing of the Bible was the concluding episode in the event of divine revelation. The Bible, then, is not a witness *to* the revelation alone, but has become an element *of* the revelation. Several writers make this same point in various ways.

The writing of the Bible brings us to its inspiration. The recording of the acts of God, the account of His personal encounters with men, and the explanation of the acts plus the statements about God found in the Bible, were accomplished under the inspiration of God's Spirit. Dr. Alan M. Stibbs,

a British evangelical scholar, discusses what the writers of the Bible say about the inspiration of their writings. Dr. Stibbs wisely counsels us that, in thinking about the inspiration of the Bible, we should not be most concerned with the fascinating psychological experience that the writers enjoyed when under the influence of divine inspiration. The important thing is the result of their having been inspired, the writings themselves. In a competent exegesis of the familiar inspiration passages, Dr. Stibbs seeks to show us what is meant by the term "inspiration" in the Bible. In his exegesis he does not draw specific conclusions concerning the inerrancy of the Bible. What he does do is call our attention to the *purposes* of the Holy Spirit in inspiring the writers. He calls our attention to two purposes. The first is "to testify of Christ." The second is "to promote the salvation of the world." Whatever else the inspiration of the Bible implies, it had to be adequate to accomplish these purposes perfectly. This means that God's inspiration provided a Bible that is reliable in its history and perfect in its "discernment of spiritual values" (p. 117). Dr. R. A. Finlayson, of Scotland, also has a word about the requirements that inspiration had to meet. "It is obvious," he writes, "that inspiration must provide everything necessary for the communication of truth. Since the Bible is a written revelation, it must be a revelation in words, and each word shares in the inspiration of the whole . . . to ensure that the revelation gains permanence in an authentic and authoritative record" (p. 224). This is a "high" view of inspiration, of verbal inspiration, but it is short of a dogmatic statement on inerrancy. Both Dr. Finlayson and Dr. Stibbs may conceivably espouse the inerrancy of the Bible. But neither make it an explicit part of his argument.

SURELY a book on the Bible as extensive as this one is says something about the inerrancy of the Bible. It does, but its writers are commendably reserved and careful in what they do say about it. I have not been able to find an exact or dogmatic commitment to a rigid and detailed inerrancy. But even if specific conclusions were drawn, our interest in them would be secondary. The *method* in which the writers get at the matter of inerrancy is our main concern. I shall try to be specific as to what I mean by inerrancy in this context. To do this, I shall propose a question about inerrancy. Then, we may observe how the authors of this volume go about answering my question. This is the question, put in three slightly different forms. Does the inspiration of the Bible require by its very nature that the Bible be totally free from inaccuracies or discrepancies? Or, we may ask, does the purpose of the Spirit in inspiring the Bible demand for its



accomplishment a Bible without a single inaccuracy or discrepancy even in details which do not materially affect the accomplishment of His purpose? Or, again, does the inspiration of the Bible imply that not even the *possibility* of such discrepancies or inaccuracies may be entertained by those who believe in verbal inspiration? How do the authors of our volume suggest that we go about seeking an answer to this question?

We may distinguish between two methods of determining the answer. When I characterize these two methods, I do not mean that every person who follows one or the other method reasons in precisely the manner that I outline. But I think the characterization may fairly serve to distinguish two generally distinct approaches. The first method is deductive. The words of the Bible are "God-breathed," as II Timothy 3:16 states. Therefore, the words of the Bible are in effect the very words of God. God cannot err. From the fact that the Bible is inspired of God, therefore, we may conclude that the Bible must be without discrepancies or inaccuracies of any kind. Those who follow this method see no reason to distinguish between details which are and those which are not germane to the Spirit's purpose. Nor is it allowable for them to permit apparent discrepancies or inaccuracies in the Bible to change or influence their understanding of inspiration. It is not allowable for the simple reason that such apparent discrepancies or inaccuracies are not real ones. The fact that God inspired the whole Bible excludes the possibility of real discrepancies and inaccuracies. That which does not really exist cannot by its "presence" influence our doctrine of inspiration. There is no compromise here, no room for adjustment, no real occasion allowed for discussion. The matter is closed once we have said that the Scriptures are inspired of God.

This, so far as I have been able to discern, is not the method used by the authors of *Revelation and the Bible*. I do not know whether all of the authors would prefer not to use this method. The question we have raised does not fall within the scope of many of the essays. It is possible that their authors, if they were expressing themselves on our question, would follow this deductive approach. But in the essays which deal directly with the doctrine of inspiration, the authors do not make the deduction from inspiration to inerrancy in the sense we spoke of it in our question. When Dr. Stibbs writes that the words of Scripture are to be "regarded as God-given, words issued on his authority, and therefore words of supreme and unchanging worth" (p. 116), he may possibly mean that these words make sentences in which discrepancies and inaccuracies are implicitly impossible. But he does not say so.

The second method is inductive. Those who

follow this method begin with the same faith as those who follow the deductive method. They begin with a commitment to the inspiration of the Bible, the absolute authority of the Word, the fact that the words of the Bible were "God-breathed." But they do not deduce an exact and precise doctrine of inerrancy from the fact of inspiration. Rather, they choose to allow the facts of Scripture to demonstrate the nature of inspiration. They seek to understand the more precise implications of inspiration by observing the character of the Scripture that was inspired. They contend that all the phenomena found in Scripture should shed light on the doctrine of inspiration and inerrancy. If, then, it appears that there are, as a matter of incontestable fact, discrepancies or inaccuracies in any of the details found in Scripture, their presence must be in harmony with the inspiration of Scripture. Those who follow this method assume that if there are clear cases of discrepancy or inaccuracy, these are real and not merely "apparent." They will be extremely careful before admitting their "real presence," but they do not rule out the possibility beforehand. And once admitted, the presence of such discrepancies or inaccuracies will shed their light on the nature of the Bible's inspiration.

The one essay which deals specifically with the question of inerrancy recommends this method. This essay, written by Dr. E. F. Harrison of Fuller Seminary, is called, "The Phenomena of Scripture." Dr. Harrison is committed to the verbal inspiration of the Bible. But he doubts whether one can deduce a precise doctrine of inerrancy from the doctrine of verbal inspiration. "One must grant," he writes, "that the Bible itself, in advancing its own claim of inspiration of the Bible will in itself prejudice us in favor of its inerrancy. But the facts — the "phenomena" — of Scripture must have the last word. "No view of Scripture," says Dr. Harrison, "can indefinitely be sustained if it runs counter to the facts. That the Bible claims inspiration is patent. The problem is to define the nature of that inspiration in the light of the phenomena contained therein" (p. 239). This quotation is clear enough hint as to the preference of the author for what we have called the inductive method. Dr. Harrison repeats the same idea when he writes (*italics are mine*): "We are not affirming that this is a dogmatic requirement [namely, that the Holy Spirit allowed the use of certain errors in Scripture], but *if the inductive study of the Bible reveals enough examples of this sort of thing to make the conclusion probable, then we shall have to hold the doctrine of inspiration in this light. We may have our own ideas as to how God should have inspired the Word, but it is more profitable to learn, if we can, how he has actually inspired it*" (p. 239).

Dr. Harrison discusses many of the "phenomena" of Scripture which raise problems concerning inerrancy.



rancy; his instances are familiar to any who have gone into the matter at all. His selection is far from complete, but it is fairly illustrative. From them he draws no specific conclusions about inerrancy. Rather, such statements as these are typical: "More light on this whole problem is urgently needed." "Every man must be persuaded in his own mind." "The phenomena which present difficulties are not to be dismissed or underrated." What is significant about this essay is not the readiness or reluctance of the author to come to dogmatic conclusions. The significant thing is the attitude, the set of mind, the method. This evangelical scholar wants the door to stay open for further study of these problematic "phenomena" of Scripture and of their bearing on inspiration. What is significant is that he insists on letting the facts, as they become incontestably clear, shed light on the question of whether inspiration must mean absolute inerrancy.

Certainly Dr. Harrison would join with the sentiments expressed by the author of the final essay in this volume, Dr. Frank Gaebelin, when he writes, "One of the great needs of the day is for scholars to re-examine in the light of all the data the concept of inerrancy as applied to Scripture" (p. 398). Dr. Harrison would also surely join Dr. Gaebelin in warning against insistence on a "rigid formulation of a position that, though accepted on faith, yet needs clarification and redefinition" (p. 398).

IN the mind of this reviewer, Dr. Harrison's approach and Dr. Gaebelin's remarks are of a kind

to promote the most fruitful application of study to the problem of inerrancy. All it means is that we let the Scriptures themselves tell us how they were inspired. Let all the facts of Scripture tell us what the Spirit of God did when He inspired the writers of Scripture. This is the better way. It is also the more difficult way. We shall, if we follow it, have a job to do that requires time, patience, humility, and courage, as well as faith. We shall have to study the Scriptures for ourselves and be willing to listen to what others have learned from their study. We shall not hurl our conclusions at each other as though we were carrying on warfare; we shall share them as we discharge a common responsibility. Nor shall we seek to secure our own positions by demanding immediate and binding ecclesiastical fiat. We are on the same ground, we believe in the God who speaks through His written Word, we have a common commitment to the authority of Scripture, we share a Spirit who will guide us into truth. We ought, then, to be able to move toward a fruitful era of Biblical study. The one thing that can hinder us is a rigid insistence on dogmatic formulations of matters that are obviously in need of further examination. If we let the facts of Scripture speak to us, if we will be patient to listen, willing to be corrected, submissive before truth, we shall never go far wrong. This is the way for us to go. If we take it, perhaps one day soon a book will come from our own community of scholars that will be even better than *Revelation and the Bible*.

## JOHN CALVIN ON THE CHURCH

(Continued from page 9)

inheritance who are not one body and one spirit." (Ephesians 4:4)

"It cannot but be our duty to cherish holy unity, which is bound by so many ties. Faith, and baptism, and God the Father, and Christ ought to unite us, so as almost to become one man." (Ephesians 4:5)

"At the same time, he points out the end of their calling: for to this end have Apostles and teachers of the Church been appointed, to gather the Lord's scattered flock, that under Christ we may all be united in the same body. (Eph. 4:11, 13) In the world there is miserable dispersion, but in Christ there is "a gathering together" of all, (Eph. 1:10) as the Apostle speaks; for there can be no other bond of union." (Isaiah 44:5)

"We have here a remarkable promise about gathering and raising up the ruins of the Church; and since the Lord is pleased to make use of our labor, let us not hesitate to

be entirely devoted to it; and although the world oppose and mock at us, and account us fools, let us take courage and conquer every difficulty. Our hearts ought to cherish assured confidence, when we know that it is the work of the Lord, and that he has commanded us to execute it." (Isaiah 58:13)

"It was not, therefore, the Psalmist's object directly to celebrate the free mercy of God in the first institution of the Church, but to argue from its original, that God would not suffer his Church altogether to fall, having once founded it with the design of preserving it for ever, for he forsakes not the work of his own hands. This comfort ought to be improved by ourselves at the present period, when we see the Church on every side so miserably rent asunder, leading us to hope that all the elect who have been adjoined to Christ's body, will be gathered unto the unity of the faith, although now scattered like members torn from one another, and that the mutilated body of the Church, which is daily distracted, will be restored to its entirety; for God will not suffer his work to fail." (Psalm 147:3)



# The Gospel and History

by Leonard Sweetman, Jr.

FIRMLY embedded in the New Testament is one central figure: Jesus Christ. The New Testament is the book of Jesus Christ, actually. Oscar Cullmann points out, for example, that the early confessions of faith embedded in the New Testament literature are, generally, purely Christological confessions. Furthermore, even "where bi-partite formulae are used, you receive the unequivocal impression that in a Christian confession, faith in God, in reality, is a function of faith in Christ."<sup>1</sup> Central, moreover, to the message of Jesus Christ is the Redemptive Act of God in Christ. God did something. God accomplished something. In Christ, redemption is accomplished. The New Testament is the description of God's redemptive activity being filled. Furthermore, central to the description of this redemptive activity which is filled in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the uniqueness, the "once-for-all" character of this act. Paul describes this "once-for-all" redemptive act by saying, "In that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God" (Rom. 6:10). Again, the sacrifice of Christ was a "once-for-all" sacrifice, according to Hebrews 7:27, through which we are sanctified "once-for-all" (Heb. 10:10).

THE life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, however, are not isolated from the rest of the Scriptures. They form part of the whole of the message of God's grace to men. That God is gracious unto men is the core of the Scriptures. His grace to men, furthermore, is a grace demonstrated and actualized in history. Grace is inextricably intertwined with history. Throughout the entire Old Testament the people of Israel are addressed by God, prophetically, with the assurance that God is gracious. God will provide redemption for you. God will give you life. God will take you to Himself. You will be, spontaneously, the people who know the will of God and do it. Although you reject God, demonstrably, God will reclaim you. Although you are the unfaithful bride, the errant son, nevertheless, God will renew you. God will remove the destructive effects of sin. God will renew the chaotic cosmos. God will reclaim mankind for Himself. He is not absent from the world of His love. He is present in it, always. He is active in

it, always. Even a figure like Cyrus is used as a minister of God in order to further the purpose, the redemptive purpose of God.

Israel, on her part, was aroused to expect the realization of these promises which were made and spun out in her history. She looked forward to the coming of the Messiah who would institute a rule of righteousness. She looked forward to the Davidic King's unveiling, who would be the agent of God's rule on earth. She expected the Prophet like unto Moses who would declare the will of God for His people; a will which would be actualized in the life of the people. In the Old Testament, God's *hesed*, God's convenantal love, His being faithful to His redemptive promises, is the recurring theme of the Law and the Prophets. History, moreover, is the arena in which both the prophecy and the fulfillment are to be realized. In history the Messianic Era will be unveiled. This redemptive promise, moreover, is to embrace the Nations as well as Israel.<sup>2</sup> All nations shall worship the faithful, gracious God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. No one shall have need to tell his neighbor what the Law is. The Law shall be emblazoned on the hearts of men; and everyone, spontaneously, shall do the will of God. God's redemptive grace, again, embraces not merely mankind; the cosmos, too, is included within the scope of this grace. The lion and the lamb shall lie down together. The earth shall become filled with the knowledge of the Lord.

All this, however, is future. The eschatology of the Old Testament, if you will, is consistently futuristic. When Messiah comes, the Present Age shall disappear and the Age to Come shall be inaugurated. When the Son of Man comes on the clouds of heaven, with His retinue of angels, then shall be initiated the Kingdom of God. When the Davidic King is enthroned, then shall be established the Kingdom of Righteousness. The certainty of these promises cause Israel to hope in captivity. One can sit on the banks of Babylon's rivers and sing the songs of Zion, because God's *hesed* will not fail. One can mourn the fickleness of Egypt and the stern tyranny of Assyria while rejoicing in

1. O. Cullmann, *Die Erste Christliche Glaubensbekenntnisse* (Zurich), p. 34.

2. The Nations, however, share in the promise of life through incorporation into Israel. This means physical incorporation into Physical Israel. The Nations will come to Jerusalem to worship. In the New Testament, the promise of life is given without this orientation. There is no male or female in Christ; neither is there, in Christ, Jew or Greek. This proved a stumbling-block to the Jewish Christians. Even some of the apostles stumbled at this point.



hope that God will bring to actualization His redemptive promises of deliverance; of restitution to the land of promise; and of the re-erection of the Kingdom.

One more note was injected into the Old Testament picture. This note was emphasized and more sharply defined in the inter-testamental era. This is the apocalyptic note. Gradually, the imminence of the denouement was emphasized. The imagery of Daniel formed the basis for the apocalyptic literature of the inter-testamental era. In summary, the inter-testamental apocalyptic writers recognized their contemporary situation under the tyranny of despots as futile, hopeless. Furthermore, the appearance of the ecclesiastical hierarchy during the Maccabean era did not erase this futility. The ecclesiastical hierarchy deviated from the norms of the Torah. Consequently, the joy which greeted the Maccabean era melted into the awareness of the futility of establishing, without direct Divine intervention of a radical character, the future Kingdom. The untold suffering of the masses indicated well that the denouement was imminent.<sup>3</sup> Contrary to the hopes of the Old Testament, however, the apocalypticists told of a Kingdom which would not be established on the earth. Evil had so vitiated the creation, through the incarnate manifestations of evil, that the earth was given to destruction. Exceptions to this can be found in the apocalyptic literature; however, this understanding, generally, characterizes the apocalypticists.<sup>4</sup>

Both normative Judaism and the apocalypticists had a consistent eschatology. They looked to the future. In the future, near or far, the Messianic Kingdom would be established. Contemporaneous with the coming of the Messiah, the Messianic Era, the Age to Come, would be inaugurated. For the writers of the Old Testament, this Kingdom would be established on a renewed earth. The coming Kingdom would embrace the Nations through incorporation into Israel. This unanimity relative to the location of the Kingdom's theatre or arena is not found in the apocalypticists.

HARD on the heels of the apocalypticists, in the fullness of time, Jesus Christ was born. Here is the fulfillment of redemption, within history. God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. Now, a re-orientation is necessary. Schweitzer is incorrect when he states that the eschatology of the Gospels is consistently futuristic.<sup>5</sup> Certainly, it is true that the Gospels as well as the Epistles look for the parousia in the near future; however, they look

foreward in hope and assurance to the return of Christ because of their orientation to the past, to the immediate past in which Christ lived and died and rose again. Their certainty of the return of Christ, of the final judgment, of the eternal Kingdom is dependent upon the fact that the End has come, the *telos* in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In the letters of Paul, above all, one is confronted with the necessity of re-thinking the entire attitude toward the Kingdom found through the Old Testament. The Messiah has come. Redemption has been accomplished. God's promises of life, salvation, deliverance, mercy, grace are filled in Christ. But, in another sense, the end is not yet. The End is not yet consummated. The tension between the "now already . . . but not yet" in the New Testament is dependent upon the recognition that in Christ, once and for all, the Kingdom has come; yet, the final consummation of the Kingdom will be in the future. The goal toward which history was tending, under God, is achieved. This was purposed by God before the foundation of the world. This mid-point, as Oscar Cullmann calls it, or the Christ-event, is a unique historical occurrence, incapable of being repeated because it is history. More than that, by far, however, the uniqueness of this Christ-event (the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ), is that the salvation, the redemption, the life of all mankind is directly dependent upon this event — upon this Person and His work.

In these terms, the once-for-all character of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ proved to be an offense in the Primitive Church. Docetism arose almost immediately in the life of the Church. This Docetism was of two kinds: the first is the kind attacked by Ignatius in his letter to the Tralians. This form of Docetism denied the reality of Christ's body, the reality of Jesus' physical existence. Ignatius summoned every argument at his disposal to demonstrate the reality of Jesus' historical existence. ". . . Jesus Christ, who was of the race of David, of the Virgin Mary; who was truly born, and did eat and drink; was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate; was truly crucified and dead; both those in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth being spectators of it. Who was also truly raised from the dead by His Father . . ."<sup>6</sup>

A second kind of Docetism existed in the Primitive Church, furthermore, which recognized "Christ's coming into the flesh . . . but among the events that the Gospels narrate a selection is now made, and only certain ones are recognized as nor-

3. H. H. Rowley, *The Revelance of Apocalyptic* (2nd. ed.; London, 1955), pp. 13-26; 47-50.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 51-90.

5. This position is set forth most clearly in Schweitzer's *The Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Mysticism of the Apostle Paul*.

6. Edward Burton, ed., "St. Ignatius' Epistle to the Tralians," *The Apostolic Fathers* (Edinburgh, 1909), p. 93. By the by, it is interesting to note that in the confession found in the writings of Ignatius and others contemporary with him, the Virgin Birth is always introduced to demonstrate the humanity of Jesus, whereas we tend to use this as a demonstration of His Deity.



mative for salvation, while others are expressly rejected. To the rejected ones belongs, above all, the death of Christ, which is explained away by all sorts of fantastic theories."<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the Docetists were scandalized by the Logos becoming *flesh*, with all the meaning and associations attached to that word by the Jews.<sup>8</sup> This is the kind of Docetism Paul, most frequently, attacks in his letters. These Docetists came to the Scriptures with the knowledge of what the scheme of salvation was. Irrespective of what content they gave, positively, to the Gospel, they were scandalized by the death on the gallows of the Christ who became *flesh*. Consequently, the Docetists subjected the history of redemption to this knowledge of theirs, removing the offense of Jesus' once-for-all death.<sup>9</sup> Whenever the Person of Jesus Christ is separated from His work, this sort of Docetism results.

Paul, as a result of his Damascus Road experience, became firmly committed to Jesus of Nazareth, whom he persecuted, as God's Christ. As a result of this commitment, Paul was driven back to the Old Testament Scriptures. How is this Christ, this kind of Christ, related to the Old Testament Scriptures? How does this kind of Christ fit into the message of the Law and the Prophets? Several contemporary theologians point out that the central motif of Paul's writings is not justification by faith, *per se*.<sup>10</sup> The center of Paul's thought is found "in his awareness that with the coming of Christ the Age to Come had become present fact the proof of which was the advent of the Spirit . . ."<sup>11</sup> As a result of this conviction, Paul, the Pharisee, went back to the Old Testament message, and read it in terms of the mid-point, in terms of the Christ-event, in terms of the fact that God had acted decisively, finally, in Christ Jesus for the salvation of the world. Paul understood, moreover, that the Christ-event was no accident of history. This was the eternal purpose of God. "For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself: by him, I say, whether they be things on earth, or things in heaven" (Colossians 1:19-20). Paul's entire attitude toward the content of the Old Testament was revised

in terms of Jesus Christ being the Messiah. Jesus Christ is the center, the content, the whole of God's promises to man, prophesied throughout the entire Old Testament. Consequently, Paul, faced with the Colossian heresy, expanded the statement made to the Corinthian Church (I Corinthians 1:24): "But unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the Wisdom of God." In writing to the Colossian Christians, concerning Jesus Christ, Paul places Christ in the history of redemption as the mid-point to whom the entire history of redemption must be oriented. He is related, intimately, to Creation and to every other moment of the history of redemption.<sup>12</sup>

When, moreover, Paul develops his thought in Colossians 1:19-20, he does so as a Jewish Rabbi, as one educated in the traditions of the Pharisees, who uses the hermeneutical principles of the Rabbinic theologians. Dr. C. F. Burney, writing about Colossians 1:15-18, makes an interesting point. He states that Colossians 1:15 is an allusion to Proverbs 8:22, "The Lord begat me as the beginning of His way." Rabbinic Judaism, furthermore, used the term *reshith* in Proverbs 8:22 as the key to the understanding of the term *breshith* used in Genesis 1:1. The term in Genesis 1:1, in this hermeneutic technique, is translated "Wisdom," "by Wisdom God created the heavens and the earth." Consequently, Burney concludes, Colossians 1:15-18 is an elaborate exposition, in the fashion of Rabbinical hermeneutical technique, of Genesis 1:1, in which Christ is linked to the Creative Act of God. "Three explanations are given of the preposition *be*, then four explanations of the substantive *reshith*; and the conclusion is that in every possible sense of the expression Christ is its fulfiller . . ."<sup>13</sup>

Let us remember that when the Alexandrian School engaged in their radical allegorization of the Scriptural text, they were attempting, in a real sense, to do justice to the unity of the Scriptures. They were attempting to salvage the Old Testament. Nevertheless, in a real sense, they were falling into Docetism. They were selecting specific factors necessary for salvation from the message of the Scriptures, and using these factors as determinative for their understanding of the entirety of the Good Message. They rejected "the judgment that redemptive history passes on the quite ordinary particular historical event that occurred in the incarnate Christ, and that includes the offensively ordinary fact of the death on the cross. Thus here also we have to do with the denial of the redemptive significance of an event that occurred in time."<sup>14</sup> Again, "the Primitive Christian conception that

7. Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time* (London, 1952), p. 126.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 127-28.

10. W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London, 1955). "In some contexts justification is merely one metaphor among many others employed by Paul to describe his deliverance through Christ, and we are not justified in petrifying a metaphor into a dogma." Pp. 221-222. H. N. Ridderbos, *When the Time Had Fully Come* (Grand Rapids, 1957). "It is at once obvious now, that the central motive of justification by faith can be understood in its real, pregnant significance only from this redemptive-historical viewpoint . . . The starting-point of Paul's preaching of justification by faith is to be found in the great turning-point in the *historia salutis*." p. 49.

11. W. D. Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

12. John 1 and Hebrews 1 relate Christ to Creation, too. The method, however, is different.

13. C. F. Burney, *Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. XXVII, January 1926, pp. 160ff. This is quoted at some length in W. D. Davies, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-152; 172.

14. Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, p. 55.



redemptive history is bound to the upward sloping time line" dissolved into metaphysics.<sup>15</sup>

IN what way, however, is one able to defend a Christocentric approach to the entire Scriptures without doing violence to the Old Testament? In

15. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

which way can one approach the Scriptures from the perspective offered by the redemptive-historical viewpoint without doing violence to the Old Testament? How can one maintain the unity of the Testaments without doing violence to the integrity of the Old Testament as redemptive history? A concluding article will suggest an answer to these questions.

## A Note on Chapels

*by Leonard Verduin*

IT has been declared that "a chapel which does not have the definite objective of becoming a church is indefensible."

Because I feel that by this statement several fine projects of our people are declared "indefensible," and because I am convinced that the statement rests upon an erroneous use of the word "chapel," I make the following observations.

If by the word "chapel" you mean an embryonic church, then it goes without saying that "a chapel which does not have the definite objective of becoming a church is indefensible."

But does the word "chapel" when used correctly designate an embryonic church? I do not think so. And it is altogether unfortunate that "chapel" has come to designate such a church.

Some decades ago an embryonic church was never called a chapel. Such an institution was in the student days of the writer called a mission station or a mission post. Into the place of these good and wholly unambiguous designations the word "chapel" has insinuated itself. This *Note* is in part a plea for the return of the word "chapel" to its proper semantic job; it is at the same time a plea for the return of the word "mission post."

A chapel is not an embryonic church. The chapel at Big Star Lake is a chapel properly so called. It does not aspire to becoming a church. And it is altogether defensible.

At Cutlerville there is a chapel rightly so called. It is not considered to be an embryonic church. And it is altogether defensible.

There is a chapel in the proper sense of the word on the campus of Calvin College. It has no intention of emerging presently as a church. But it is as "defensible" as can be.

The time may come when the Christian Reformed Church will hear the call to erect a chapel at some military center (the present writer would be heartily in favor of such a project right now). If that time

comes the church will not be calling into being an embryonic church. It ought to be assured that to strike out in that direction of witness is defensible, with no strings attached.

There is a chapel in the proper sense of the word at Ann Arbor. It was not intended to be an embryonic church — as is apparent from the fact that not the Home Missions Committee was placed in charge of it but a specially constructed committee for Religious Work at Ann Arbor. I have always felt that this was a defensible project, and I am very much of that opinion still.

It should be apparent to the least sophisticated that with the word "chapel," when correctly used, goes the word "chaplain." A chaplain is a spiritual worker whose workshop is a chapel.

THE word "chapel" is old. It has been used with a definite connotation for a millenium or more. Chapels were called chapels all through medieval times. The word came up because a term was needed to designate the non-parish type of religious unit. The regular church was geographically delineated; it consisted of a parish. But very soon it became apparent that over and above the regular parish churches there was need for sanctuaries and services, in military establishments for example. And so the chapel was devised. Frequently such non-parish churches, such chapels, were carved out in the court of kings and lords. The clergymen who officiated there came to be known as chaplains. It will be recalled that the pope worships in a chapel to this day. In no case was a chapel construed to be an embryonic church, a parish in the making.

The Reformers inherited the term "chapel." And they continued to use it in its accepted connotation. Guido de Bres served in the Chapel of Henri Robert de la Marck in Sedan, receiving permission from this Prince to make the fateful



trip to Antwerp and from there to the Valenciennes from which he never came back. From his Chapel headquarters de Brés wrote letters to consistories, to the consistory of "Capernaum" (cryptic name for Antwerp) for instance; but he never sent greetings from the consistory under which he was serving. — for the sufficient reason that chapels did not have them.

Luther was aware of the authentic meaning of the word "chapel" and he used the word "chapelain" in its only proper sense. There was a time when Luther was still hopeful that a new church would result from his efforts, a church, namely, that consisted of believers and of them only. He wanted the names of all those who were prepared to accept the Christ and to follow Him to have their names inscribed in a ledger. This body was then to meet in private, that is, "away from the public gaze." Here Luther wanted the Sacraments to be administered, discipline to be exercised, etc. This was to be *the Church*. But Luther wanted to conserve the medieval notion also, the idea of a church embracing the entire populace. (It was this both-and policy of Luther that spoiled his work in a very serious way; the creation of the *Landeskirchen* was the inevitable outcome.) Now

it is highly pertinent that Luther wanted to be the pastor of the "true" Church, the believers' church. And for our present purpose it is significant that he wanted the rest of the populace to gather in another meeting place *with a chaplain in charge!* It is apparent that the unit served by the chaplain was not intended to be another parish, like unto the one served by Luther himself save that it needed a little time to come forth out of the womb

IT is not until modern times that we hear the word "chapel" used of a church *in the making*; it is not until modern times that "chapel" is used for a church that is like all other churches save for the fact that it still needs a little time before it can be born. To say that "a chapel which does not have the definite objective of becoming a church is indefensible" is to use "chapel" in a new and unwarranted way.

If men wish to empty a word of its historic meaning and pour into it a new and different meaning, they owe it to their fellows to state their intention and to argue their point. This is an obligation especially in the realm of religion. It is a duty that has been wholly shirked in the matter of the word "chapel."

# The Institutes: Calvin's Spiritual Autobiography

*by John Timmer*

Among those who with a justified pride name themselves Calvinists one not infrequently meets with some notions about Calvin and his work that may be called highly questionable. Some sort of schizophrenic interpretation of the Reformer seems to be current which holds Calvin the theologian and Calvin the believer to be different persons. An echo of this can be heard, for example, in an advertisement in one of the recent issues of *The Banner*. Here Dr. John Kromminga's book *Thine Is My Heart* is commended to the readers with these words: "Dr. Kromminga has gathered articles of warm, practical devotion, rather than the theological dissertations which have made Calvin justly famous. Here, then, is the human, tender side of Calvin . . ." Are we to infer from this that in his theological dissertations we meet the inhuman, hard, and pitiless side of Calvin? Perhaps this was not meant. Nevertheless, the reader is offered a notion as to who Calvin was and what

he did, and this notion is misleading. Taking this advertisement as, in some ways, a representatively symptomatic indication of what may be termed a schizophrenic interpretation of Calvin, I should like in this article to present a picture of Calvin which I believe is truer to the facts. I propose to do so by attempting to indicate and demonstrate the relation between Calvin's spiritual life and his theological dissertation *par excellence*: *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

A patient and careful reader of *The Institutes* will no doubt frequently be struck by its experiential coloring and its devotional and personal tone. The impression which is left with the reader is that he has encountered not only the God of Scripture, but to no small degree also the author himself. This is not at all surprising. For when someone, whose entire existence is fully dedicated to the divine cause, sets out to expound in systematic form the doctrine of man's, and, therefore, his own



salvation, his personal experiences in the realm of faith can be expected to permeate and shine through each part of his writing, whether this be the result of a conscious or an unconscious process. *The Institutes* were written by the whole man Calvin and are not exclusively the fruits of an ingenious, well-educated, and regenerate mind. For this reason *The Institutes* are more than simply a compact and well-organized textbook of theology. They are more than a useful doctrinal treatise for ministers and "an arsenal of arguments for simple believers" (M. Buisson). They are also a profession of Calvin's faith, a window offering the reader a clear view of Calvin's intimate spiritual life. To state it somewhat more precisely: *The Institutes* are Calvin's spiritual autobiography.

But to qualify *The Institutes* as Calvin's spiritual autobiography is to invite misunderstanding. In what sense can they be thus characterized? Are we to consider them as some sort of diary in which Calvin wrote down his religious experiences from time to time? Or must we perhaps assign *The Institutes* to the same literary category as Augustine's *Confessions*? It should be clear that neither of these alternatives is defensible. Rather, what is meant is this: In systematically expounding the content of Scripture Calvin communicates to his readers what was first of all the substance of his own religious experience. What Calvin offers his readers is not merely a topical and logical arrangement of the Biblical doctrine of salvation, but something which he had tried, tested, and appropriated himself as well. *The Institutes* were nothing less than the inwardly appropriated and personally experienced divine revelation poured into a systematic framework. It is in this sense that *The Institutes* can rightly be called Calvin's spiritual autobiography.

This idea is not new. In its implicit form it can be found in statements of several authors, as, for example, James Moffatt: "That which makes me pass the most favorable judgment possible upon Calvin's theology, is that this theology emerges from his experience. He is neither a doctrinaire nor a professional theologian."<sup>1</sup> Is there, however, any "internal evidence" to justify viewing *The Institutes* as spiritual autobiography? Does Calvin anywhere speak about the relation between his religious experience and his theological dissertations? Indeed, he does.

In his polemical reply to Cardinal Sadolet, Calvin at one point utters the accusation: "Hence I observe, Sadolet, that you have too superficial a theology, as is almost always the case with those who have never had experience in serious strug-

gles of conscience." Here, in clear terms, Calvin asserts that the intensity of one's (religious) experience and the profundity of one's theology are related matters. One's theology must have been inwardly tried and tested if it is to have any real and abiding value. True theology must be the outward projection of what is first of all inwardly absorbed.

But why is this so? The answer lies in the relation which ought to exist between theology and piety: "that union of reverence and love to God which the knowledge of his benefits inspires" (I, 2, 1). To the title of the French translation of the 1539 edition of *The Institutes* are added the words: "in which is contained a summary of piety and, as it were, all that is necessary to be known in the doctrine of salvation." From this it would appear that Calvin intended *The Institutes* to be, first of all, a summary of piety, and then of doctrine. Theology has only the subordinate function of leading man to the performance of his intended primary task of glorifying God. Therefore theology and is ultimate fulfillment in the believers adoration of God may never be separated. "Theology is doxology or it is nothing at all" (E. Stauffer). Whenever theology ceases to be thinking and speaking to God's glory it will degenerate to some sort of idolatry. For this reason theology and religious experience are related, for it is exactly "in serious struggles of conscience" that one's piety proves its worth.

But Calvin's writings offer us still more direct evidence in support of our thesis. In the familiar preface to his commentary on the Psalms Calvin writes about himself:

Now, if any readers derive any fruit and advantage from the labour which I have bestowed in writing these Commentaries, I would have them to understand that the small measure of experience which I have had by the conflicts with which the Lord has exercised me, has in no ordinary degree assisted me, not only in applying to present use whatever instruction could be gathered from these divine compositions, but also in more easily comprehending the design of each of the writers. And, as David holds the principal place among them, it has greatly aided me in understanding more fully the complaints made by him . . . . For although I follow David at a great distance, and come far short of equalling him . . . yet if I have any things in common with him, I have no hesitation in comparing myself with him . . . . [It has] been of very great advantage to me to behold in him as in a mirror, both the commencement of my calling, and the continued course of my function; so that I know the more assuredly, that whatever that most illustrious king and prophet suffered, was exhibited to me by God as an example for imitation.

And: . . . in considering the whole course of the life of David, it seemed to me that by his own footsteps he showed me the way. . . .

1. Quoted on the authority of E. Doumergue, *Jean Calvin* (1910), IV, 430. See further, IV, 1, where D. Nisard and F. Brunetiere are quoted to the same effect. Also B. B. Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism* (1931), p. 26, for the statement of Paul Wernle.



Two things especially interest us in these passages: (1) Calvin's statement to the effect that his own experience furnished him an exegetical key to the meaning of the Psalms, and (2) Calvin's identification of himself with David.

Calvin maintains that this experience enabled him to become intimately acquainted with the minds of the Psalmists. For the purpose of seeing *The Institutes* as spiritual autobiography it is very significant to note that in them the book of Psalms is more often cited than any other book of the Bible. This is not at all surprising, for according to Calvin's own words the book of Psalms is "an anatomy of all the parts of the soul," because, as he says, "there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. . . . the Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated." It is no wonder, therefore, that no other Bible book is so often (558 times) cited as the Psalms, since no other book was so congenial to Calvin's religious experience.

Calvin, in a modest way, identifies himself with David. This seems like an invitation to see in many of Calvin's descriptions of David's life and thought a reflection of Calvin himself. That this conclusion can justifiably be drawn is shown by a study of those passages in *The Institutes* which are obviously autobiographical.<sup>2</sup>

But what, someone may ask, can be called autobiographical passages? The best way in which to answer this question is by citing a few examples, thereby taking into account the different editorial strata in so far as this proves to be important for our purpose. Most (36) of the evidently autobiographical passages can be found in those sections of *The Institutes* which deal with God's attributes, divine providence, faith, the sacraments, hope, prayer, and self-denial.

#### *On God's attributes<sup>3</sup>*

. . . the only means of ascertaining their practical operation and tendency is to descend into ourselves, and consider how it is that the Lord there manifests his wisdom, power, and energy, — how he there displays his justice, goodness, and mercy. For although David . . . (I, 5, 10).

. . . such as we feel him [i.e. God] to be when experience is our guide, such he declares himself to be by his word (I, 10, 2).

2. There are at least 53 such passages, in which Calvin quite clearly is talking about himself. Of these passages 45 may be characterized as regular, 8 as strongly autobiographical. Of those 45 regular autobiographical passages, 38% (22) contain references to or citations from Davidic passages. But of those 8 strongly autobiographical passages 63% (5) contain references to Davidic passages. It is this jump from 38 to 63% which is highly significant for what we are trying to demonstrate. For what this indicates is that when Calvin is most clearly speaking about himself, his appeal to Davidic passages is most frequent.

3. See also I, 14, 21 and III, 2, 41.

#### *On God's providence<sup>4</sup>*

In Book I, 17, 8 one can clearly recognize Calvin in his struggle to submit himself to God's providential guidance in the injustice inflicted upon him by those responsible for his exile from Geneva. The reasons for thus interpreting this paragraph are, first, the autobiographical nature of the preceding paragraph; second, the words of Joseph and David during *their* periods of exile quoted in our paragraph; but mostly the content of those sections written in 1539, the second year of Calvin's exile from Geneva. One of these sections reads:

If there is no more effectual remedy for anger and impatience, he assuredly has not made little progress who has learned so to meditate on Divine Providence, as to be able always to bring his mind to this, "The Lord willed it, it must therefore be borne; not only because it is unlawful to strive with him, but because he wills nothing that is not just and befitting." The whole comes to this. When unjustly assailed by men, overlooking their malice . . . , let us remember to ascend to God, and learn to hold it for certain that whatever an enemy wickedly committed against us was permitted, and sent by his righteous dispensation.

#### *On faith<sup>5</sup>*

I am not forgetting what I formerly said, and experience brings daily to remembrance — viz that faith is subject to various doubts, so that the minds of believers are seldom at rest . . . (III, 2, 37).

Scripture does not set before us a brighter or more memorable example of faith than in David, especially if regard be had to the constant tenor of his life. And yet how far his mind was from being always at peace is declared by innumerable complaints . . . (III, 2, 17).<sup>6</sup>

#### *On the sacraments<sup>7</sup>*

On the communion with Christ as enjoyed at the Lord's Table, Calvin writes:

. . . whenever this subject is considered, after I have done my utmost, I feel that I have spoken far beneath its dignity. And though the mind is more powerful in thought than the tongue in expressions, it too is overcome and overwhelmed by the magnitude of the subject. All then that remains is to break forth in admiration of the mystery . . . (IV, 17, 7).

#### *On Scripture<sup>8</sup>*

. . . we feel a divine energy living and breathing in it — an energy by which we are drawn and animated to obey it . . . (I, 7, 5).

These are but several of the fifty-three passages which, like the peak of an iceberg, are plainly observable to the eye and can be spotted without much

4. See also I, 16, 3; I, 17, paragraphs 1, 2, 7, 11.

5. See also III, 2, paragraphs 4, 15, 16, 18-21, 23.

6. Compare this to the section from the preface of Calvin's Commentary on the Psalms as previously quoted.

7. See also IV, 1, 1; 16, 32; 17, 32.

8. See also II, 10, 7; IV, 17, 24.



effort. The rest of *The Institutes* is of the same personal and experiential nature but this nature lies below the level of immediate observation.

One more argument, indirectly rather than directly supporting our thesis, will be advanced. We may call it the existential nature of Calvin's theology. By this simply is meant that Calvin's theology is never irrelevant to the spiritual needs of his readers. As Calvin himself states: "In reading the Scriptures we should constantly direct our inquiries and meditations to those things which tend to edification, not indulge in curiosity, or in studying things of no use" (I, 14, 4). It is for this reason that worship of and obedience to God are, in Calvin's theology, always correlated to the knowledge of God. "For him the religious or existential response is not something that may or may not come in addition to knowledge of God, but is part of its very definition." No single aspect of the knowledge of God is set forth as something toward which the reader may assume a neutral or disinterested attitude. The fact that Calvin often incorporates large portions of historical material into *The Institutes* and that he frequently engages in lengthy polemical discussions should not mislead us in this respect. For, as he says, "I hesitated not to dwell at greater length on topics on which the salvation of my hearers depend" (*Reply to Sadolet*). And it is exactly the historical and polemical sections that stand out because of their length.

9. E. A. Dowey. *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (1952), p. 26.

## BOOK REVIEWS

BY WHAT STANDARD? By R. J. Rushdoony. Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co. 1959. \$3.95.

Reviewed by LESTER DEKOSTER

This book is subtitled: "An Analysis of the Philosophy of Cornelius Van Til."

While the book is no doubt a faithful "exposition," as the Preface describes it, of Dr. Van Til's system, it is hardly critical enough to qualify as an *analysis*. So profuse, indeed, is the author's tribute to his mentor's philosophy, that little more could be added in commendation, and little room remains for the evaluative temper essential to objective analysis.

The book presents a welcome synthesis of Dr. Van Til's scattered writings. It is already condensed and schematic, and could hardly profit from an at-

tempted outline in review. As an introduction to the philosophy which the volume expounds, the student may read it with profit; but for an analytic evaluation of that system, he will turn elsewhere.

Reverend Rushdoony's book does, however, aptly illustrate one phenomenon with which students of Dr. Van Til's thought are becoming, I think, increasingly familiar; and that is the tendency which a closed system exhibits toward becoming an absolutized one. One finds here an interesting illustration of this phenomenon.

Either a thinker is relatively receptive

Speculation for its own sake, for the sake of intellectual satisfaction, finds no place in Calvin, whose theology is always in closest touch with living experience. The *infra-supra-lapsarian* controversy would, no doubt, have been severely condemned by him as would all theological argumentation in which phrases such as "the logical priority in the mind of God" are taken seriously to any degree.

Calvin's theology is existential, that is, it expresses in its entirety a profound concern for the spiritual life of his reading audience. But what better or other way was open to Calvin to show such concern than that of testifying to the things God had done for him?

Such, then, in brief, is the case for approaching *The Institutes* as Calvin's spiritual autobiography.

Still one more thing should be added — the moral of the story. This presentation will only have served its purpose if it succeeds in making us more fully aware of the fact that if Calvin is to be of true benefit and real significance to us, we first of all must come to a meaningful understanding of the spirit in which and the purpose for which *The Institutes* were written. We should do well to forget for the moment the "systematic theologian" Calvin and to become better acquainted with the "believer" Calvin. For Calvin was "neither a doctrinaire nor a professional theologian"; he was, rather, a man of God who with profound concern addressed the hungry heart, not the inquisitive mind, of his reader.

to criticism, correction, and re-orientation, or he is not. If he is not amenable to correction, certain consequences — which I think Reverend Rushdoony's book clearly illustrates — are likely to follow.

Perhaps other readers can discern from the book before us that the system here expounded has been modified in significant ways over the years by critics and criticism. What I, however, gain from reading the book is the impression that critics and criticism have generally been regarded as simply so far forth heretical. And this illustrates, as I say, what follows when the closed system culminates in the absolutized one.

When growth from accretion, or from the outside, so to speak, is relatively impossible, for whatever reason, the system is left to feed only upon itself. Its history becomes one of elaboration and defense. There is an



apparent development, but this proves upon examination to be illusory; for the history of this seeming growth is but that of a continuous criticism of others, while the system itself is only reformulated from a fixed and stratified starting point. Moreover, the apparent brilliance of the analysis and criticism of others is found often to reside in obligating the other thinker to conclusions which he himself expressly denies. More and more, as the thinker isolates himself progressively from those who attempt correction and criticism of his system, it becomes for him and his adherents this system or none; and the cycle which Reverend Rushdoony illustrates becomes complete when the system moves from the closed circle to the absolutized one.

It is no accident, therefore, when Reverend Rushdoony caps his praise of Dr. Van Til's thought by saying, "The difficulty most people experience is not with Van Til's writing but with his God; it is essentially He whom they find unacceptable and offensive. Their quarrel is not with what they cannot understand in Van Til but with that which they all too clearly understand" (p. 98).

If we take Reverend Rushdoony's words to mean what they say, it is difficult to conceive of a more explicit endeavor to identify a man's thought with God's. Reverend Rushdoony has moved from the closed system to the absolutized one, and has illustrated by so doing a tendency resident in the philosophy which he expounds.

And, as I have suggested above, certain consequences follow from the state of mind which absolutism engenders. Reverend Rushdoony thinks of criticism of Dr. Van Til's thought as "unbiblical," or "unReformed," or "ostensibly Reformed," or the result of "folly," or the consequence of "blindness." He thinks of one critic as a fit candidate for ecclesiastical censure, and he understands the tone of some criticism as "abuse," "slander," and charged with "venom." And, since he seems unable to suppose that a critic of Dr. Van Til can rest his case upon valid premises, he concludes that critics must be motivated by their hurt reaction to the sharp sting of Dr. Van Til's penetrating exposure of their hidden unbiblical presuppositions.

Those whom Reverend Rushdoony thus characterizes are not intellectual and spiritual opponents from outside the Christian community; they are

members of the Reformed household, among them Masselink, De Boer, Orlebeke, Daane, and Berkouwer. And soon, no doubt, Dooyeweerd will be joined to this company.

In short, the prospective student of philosophical theology may wish to study carefully the book before us. He can observe here what kind of thinking and what kind of writing arise out of one man's wholehearted commitment to this philosophy. Probably he will enjoy Reverend Rushdoony's easy and oft-times vigorous style, though he will wince at his bad logic and courageous *non sequiturs*. He may well applaud

the author's intense loyalty to a cause, even as he deplors his reckless and extravagant exposition of its tenets. He will respect the genuine concern for theological rectitude, even as he recoils from the attempted identification of the tenets of human philosophy with the Faith itself.

Having weighed carefully what he has here observed, the careful student will prefer, for disciplined statement, for theological insight, for intellectual power, for judgment, learning, and Biblical orientation, the work of such men as, to mention only two, Berkouwer and Daane:

THE CHURCH'S MINISTRY TO THE OLDER UNMARRIED, by M. D. Hugen. 122 pp. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959. \$2.00.

Reviewed by JOHN H. BRATT, Chairman of the Bible Department, Calvin College.

Many doctoral dissertations have vast patches of aridity and are fated to be read by a few and then relegated to academic catacombs as potential musty tomes of antiquity. And many of them are highly theoretical, holding appeal only for starry-eyed denizens of the "ivory tower." Furthermore, they are consistently bereft of anything approximating the humorous. Not so this sociologico-theological thesis. It is directed to an oft-neglected phase of the Church's population which, deliberately or circumstantially, eschews the bonds of matrimony. Warrant for engaging in this poimeical study is located in the comprehensiveness of God's salvation, involving the sociological and psychological factors in close conjunction with the spiritual, and in the comprehensiveness of the Church's ministry, tying *diakonia* and *koinonia* to its *kerygma* of the saving love of God in Christ.

This interesting study carries a two-fold message: one for the Church and the other for the object of this phase of the Church's *cure of souls*. The Church, by projecting the light of Scripture, must evaluate current premises and seek to revise and correct society's erroneous attitudes and patterns. Marriage is not the *summum bonum*, widespread assertion and assumption to the

contrary. In the Bible all earthly relationships, including that of marriage, attain no more than secondary importance. Woman is cultural as well as procreative and never to set foot on the bridal path does not spell failure for her in life. Scripture nowhere stipulates an absolute obligation to marry. To serve Christ, either in single blessedness or in married bliss, is the sole binding precept upon mankind. As a corollary, the older unmarried girl (the bulk of the thesis is devoted to her and her particular problems: aloneness, sexuality, etc.) must not be deluded into assuming that marriage is indispensable to her proper self-realization. There must be on her part no morose ponderings on the past and no morbid fears of the future. She must willingly accept rather than be grudgingly resigned to her God-given status in life. She must recognize her own value and importance, be aware of extraordinary opportunities that attend single service, and seek to realize her specific calling as a Christian in this world.

Secondly, the Church must make its *koinonia* a living reality. Marriage ought never to be permitted to become the key to the deeper fellowship of the Church. All members of the Church are constituent members of the Body of Christ and as such are entitled to



friendship, love, and hospitality. *Apartheidness* has no place in a fellowship bound by ties of faith in a common Redeemer and Lord.

Thirdly, there must be sympathetic pastoral counsel. The counselee must be made to realize that these basic drives which create the specific problems are natural and that for the sake of spiritual health they must be frankly faced and recognized and find their resolution in a life of self-control

under the enablement of the Spirit of God.

Fourthly, the author suggests that, in line with the action of the *Hervormde Kerk* in 1951, it is not inexpedient nor improper for the Church to promote a Marriage Contact Bureau, where the unmarried are introduced to other eligibles within the framework of the Christian faith. The creation of such an agency, he contends, does not differ essentially from the Church's promotion

of hospitals, orphanages, homes for the aged and other social institutions.

This dissertation does not tap hitherto unexplored profundities. It does not clarify and shed new light on that which was previously inexplicable. Nor does it propound novel solutions. But it does point up a phase of ministerial and congregational service that has not received adequate attention and as such it constitutes a valuable addition to the body of poimencal literature.

## LETTERS TO THE JOURNAL

SIRS:

Several years ago a minister of the Christian Reformed Church and myself, a minister of the Reformed Church in America, were walking home together from a meeting of the City Ministers Alliance. Before going to our homes (the parsonages were less than a block apart) we talked about the address we had heard. Something in connection with the address made me make a remark about the various denominations using the word "Reformed," such as the Reformed Church, the Christian Reformed Church, the Berean Reformed Church, the Protestant Reformed Church, the Nederduitsch Reformed Church and the Protestant Reformed Church. My friend then said, "There must be something wrong with our theology."

I was reminded of these words after reading the two interesting articles on *John Calvin and Ecumenicity* by John Bratt, and the informative article by Rev. Leonard Verduin on *Calvin on Secession*. Early in my ministry a parishioner sold me a complete second-hand set of Calvin's Commentaries and three books of his Tracts which I have used for years. The more I read Calvin the more I learned about his ecumenicity and the more strange it seemed to me that many of the spiritual sons of Calvin showed so little of his spirit. Why was this? Has Calvin's doctrine about the Church been overlooked?

Calvin had a high regard for the Church. He called the Church the mother of the pious and the queen and the mother of all the godly. The church at Corinth was troubled by doctrinal and ethical problems. Calvin asks, "What ground, then, had Paul

for recognizing a Church at Corinth?" This question he answers by saying that Paul "saw among them the doctrine of the gospel, baptism, the Lord's Supper — tokens by which a Church ought to be judged of. For although some had begun to have doubts as to the resurrection, the error not having spread over the entire body, the name of the Church and its reality are not thereby affected. Some faults had crept in among them in the administration of the Supper, discipline and propriety of conduct had very much declined; despising the simplicity of the gospel, they had given themselves up to show and pomp; and in consequence of the ambition of their ministers, they were split into various parties. Notwithstanding of this, however, inasmuch as they retained fundamental doctrines; as the one God was adored among them, and was invoked in the name of Christ; as they placed their dependence for salvation upon Christ, and had a ministry not altogether corrupted: there was, on these accounts, a Church still existing among them. Accordingly, wherever the worship of God is preserved unfringed, and that fundamental doctrine, of which I have spoken, remains, we must without hesitation conclude that in that case a Church exists." Of the Galatian Church Calvin says, "I reply that so long as they professed Christianity and worshipped God, observed the sacraments and enjoyed some kind of gospel ministry, they retained the external marks of the Church."

In a sermon entitled "On Serving God Purely" Calvin answers those who object to the Church and say, "What should we have to do with a Church where we shall see troubles and scan-

dals that are now unknown to us? If in the places where the gospel is preached there were such a discipline as might be well fitted to edify us, and we were assured of meeting only with angels to lead us into Paradise, we would be off at once; but say we are actually arrived: we shall hear many things which only scandalize, and see more than there is any occasion for. There will be a host of debauchees, who defame the gospel by their dissolute lives. Vanity, pomp, drunkenness, and the like, will be too much in vogue. Still worse, we shall see despisers of God so monstrous that nothing worse can be beheld in the Papacy . . . Granting that things are ten times worse, it is still a frivolous excuse for those who bar themselves out from approaching the Church of God."

Calvin was strongly opposed to all schisms. In *The Institutes* he says, "But I maintain that we ought not on account of every trivial difference of sentiment to abandon the Church which retains the saving and pure doctrine that insures the preservation of piety and supports the use of the sacraments instituted by our Lord." In his exposition of John 9:16, Calvin says, "A schism is a highly pernicious and destructive evil in the Church of God." In a comment on I Corinthians 13, Calvin says, "For we must be one body, if we would be kept together under him as our head. If, on the other hand, we are split asunder into different bodies, we start aside from him also." The prayers of Calvin are worth noting. Observe his longing for unity in the following prayer: "Grant Almighty God that we as we are so scattered in our pilgrimage in this world that even a dreadful spectacle is presented to our eyes when we see thy Church so miserably rent a-



sunder — O grant that we, being endued with the real power of thy Spirit and gathered into one, may so cultivate brotherly kindness among ourselves that each may strive to help the other." In his exposition of Galatians 5:10, Calvin says, "Let all who introduce confusion into churches, who break the faith, who destroy their harmony, lend an ear to this; and if they have any right feeling, let them tremble at this word." Other similar passages from Calvin's writings can be quoted.

In the light of what Calvin teaches about the Church and schisms one wonders whether the secessions which gave birth to new denominations were justified. Did those who made secessions practice the teachings of Calvin and the Scriptures? Perhaps my friend was right when he said that there must be something wrong with our theology. Could it be that the teachings of Calvin about the Church have been slighted? Calvin College and Seminary sponsored an interesting series of lectures on "The Principles and Problems of Contemporary Calvinism," but in the series there was no lecture about the Church.

Dr. Bratt says, "It is to Calvin's undying credit that he grasped every opportunity to resolve the differences in Christendom. He possessed a strong ecumenical spirit." But what about the spiritual sons of Calvin? Does the history of church life of the Dutch Calvinists in America reveal a like spirit? The secessions were about marginal matters — not about fundamental truths. If some who in the past fostered the spirit of secession had worked and prayed as diligently for unity, the results would have been more in keeping with the teachings of Calvin. Why not begin now to apply the principles of Calvin and reveal his ecumenical spirit? It is not enough to have the truth — truth should be practiced.

*Sincerely yours,*  
C. P. DAMME

SIRS:

Mark Twain once remarked, "In our country we have those three unspeakably precious things: freedom of thought, freedom of speech, and the prudence never to practice either." However, from one's own personal experience one knows that this needn't always be so. Who has not had the joy of having his viewpoint corrected and broadened by an intimate conver-

sation with a kind, understanding pastor or with a scholarly teacher? Surely, that is one purpose friends serve: the freedom to think aloud without fear of castigation. If this privilege were permitted more, it is possible that psychiatrists would have less to do.

But when one seeks to express his thoughts on an issue that has public concern, he is immediately confronted by a number of obstacles. So many, that only the reckless or the ones inured to unfounded criticism dare to think and dare to speak. And what are these obstacles? To enumerate and to explain some of them is the main intent of this letter.

The first obstacle is the unnumbered and unclassified host of labellers. Think a new thought in religion, and one is labelled a modernist or liberal. In economics he is grouped with the Communists or the leftists, and in politics he is called a radical or reactionary. Labelling may be an easy substitution for real thought, but it is surely uncharitable and flouts the spirit of the Ninth Commandment. Labelling is the tool of the demagogue and the alarmist cry of the self-appointed "watchman."

Another impediment to expression is the stickly gumbo of the status-quo mind, which is altogether satisfied with things in general just as they are. Shakespeare and Washington Irving have depicted this kind of person vividly in their writings. To such a mind everything has been thought out, and there are no problems. When one reads the Gospel of our Lord's life, he finds that the Lord was often upsetting this mentality with startling new approaches. To the well-behaved and well-versed rich young ruler Jesus said, "Sell all what thou hast." To Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again." To the disciples, "Seventy times seven."

The omniscient mind can also prove an annoyance to those who attempt to express new ideas. One thinks of Luther's unwise opinions of Copernicus and his concepts of astronomy. The omniscient mind passes judgment on matters which are actually beyond its particular study and training. One recalls how the Catholic Church opposed the discoveries of Galileo.

Aware of these obstacles, the thinker must be on guard against his own weaknesses. One of these is the tendency to speak too much and too often. Another is the habit of concentrating on the newness of his ideas rather than



**Your Standard  
of  
Excellence  
since 1912**

You always look your best, are your best in a BENTLEY & SIMON pulpit robe. Hand-sewn and custom-tailored for perfect fit, for lasting enjoyment.

CHOIR ROBES, too, individually made in the same quality way.

**BENTLEY & SIMON**  
7 West 36th St.  
New York 18, N. Y.

Write for  
catalog F-7

PULPIT ROBES

on the soundness of them. To be different for the sake of difference and to be purposely shocking for its effects betrays an immaturity of mind; but the uncautious thinker is sometimes lured into these shallow by-channels.

In the region of theological thought, where the Word of God is a sure guide, one would hope to find charity and self-assured tolerance. Here the searcher for new truths would be guided by the steady hand of matured conviction. Yet history tells another story. Think of the Catholic Inquisition, the Puritan witch hunt, and, yes, even the burning of Servetus. These are large instances, but smaller instances have occurred within the history of our own Reformed denomination. Too often the gallant defenders of Biblical truth were careless in their methods of defense. Like the U.S. marshal of Western folklore they have been too eager to draw their six-shooters of accusation and denunciation. It was forgotten that the supposedly and actually erring brother was still a brother.

Recently a student sought to explore an area for theological consideration. But he ventured too far; all the denominational searchlights focused on him as if he were a thief caught in the act of stealing. An incident which could have been dealt with in the home (the seminary) became the concern of the whole town. And what a morsel it made for juicy gossip. Was the mandate of Matthew 18:15 heeded meticulously in this instance?

*Sincerely yours,*  
JOHN H. SIETSEMA